



Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies



SPECIAL ASSESSMENT

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Asia-Pacific Responses to U.S. Security Policies

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Let's Just Be Friends: New Zealand's Response to U.S. Security Policies

J I M R O L F E

Executive Summary

- New Zealand and the United States had an extremely close security relationship until the mid-1980s, at which point New Zealand was classified by the United States as a friend rather than an ally.
- New Zealand and the United States hold very similar views on values such as the need for democracy within states, the effectiveness of open markets and the international trading regime and the importance of human rights. The two countries also take a similar stance on issues such as the relationship between Taiwan and China, the Korean Peninsula and the India-Pakistan dispute.
- New Zealand supports the United States in the war on terrorism.
- New Zealand is discouraged by the United States' cavalier approach to multilateral institutions.
- New Zealand holds more firmly than does the United States to the need for the United Nations to authorize military action against Iraq.
- Despite the similarity of their international outlooks, New Zealand is content to remain a friend rather than an ally of the United States.

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BACKGROUND

In June 1940 the British Government told New Zealand that, in the event of war in the Pacific, British (and thus New Zealand) interests there would have to be safeguarded by the United States. For the next 45 years New Zealand considered, with greater or lesser emphasis, that the country's defense and security would be underpinned by a strong U.S. presence in the Pacific region combined with a close military relationship between the two countries.

Formal security treaty arrangements were made between the two countries (and others) through the Anzus Treaty (1951) and the Southeast Asian Collective Defense Treaty (1954). In support of regional security, New Zealand troops fought as allies with the United States in Korea in the 1950s and in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s. By the early 1970s, Anzus was being described officially as the "keystone of New Zealand's security." From then until the early 1980s, the consensus within New Zealand (in official circles at least) was that the alliance relationship with the United States was indeed the foundation of national security.

The consensus began to erode in the early 1980s with the rise of a middle-class peace movement in New Zealand coinciding with the election in 1984 of a government in which many members had been active in the anti-Vietnam war movement. Activists within the peace movement focused on a long-held antipathy to nuclear weapons within New Zealand and a residual anti-American sentiment. (Antinuclear sentiments had been present since at least the mid 1960s when a proposal to promote a Southern Hemisphere Nuclear Free Zone had attracted 80,000 signatures). The activists began a grass-roots campaign to force the government to refuse entry to New Zealand ports of nuclear powered or armed warships, (these being symbolic of the treaty relationship) as they made routine port visits for training and recreation.

Although the government did not completely share the activists' views, in 1985, following a formal request by the United States for a warship to be permitted entry to New Zealand, the government decided that this could only occur if the ship was certified as "not carrying nuclear weapons." This would have breached the long-standing U.S. policy to "neither confirm nor deny" the presence of nuclear weapons and the visit did not take place. Subsequent negotiations did not resolve the issue and, after New Zealand introduced into Parliament the *New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone Disarmament and Arms Control Bill* (which barred the entry into New Zealand of both nuclear propulsion and nuclear weapons) in 1986, the United States declared New Zealand to be "a friend but not an ally" on the grounds that (in effect) banning U.S. warships from New Zealand's waters was not compatible with the spirit of the Anzus Treaty.

The immediate outcome was that the United States cut off all routine military training links with New Zealand for individuals and units, discontinued the flow of military intelligence to New Zealand and refused to participate in multilateral military exercises if New Zealand were also to be a participant. Despite these measures, New Zealand did not change its policy, recognizing that full military cooperation between the United States and New Zealand was unobtainable given the divergence in each country's policies. New Zealand therefore set a course designed to minimize the outcomes for New Zealand, if not for the armed forces. Rather than push for any resumption of routine military links, New Zealand began to work diplomatically to reassure the United States and other friendly states that New Zealand had not suddenly changed its world outlook on fundamental foreign policy issues. To reinforce this, New Zealand continued to cooperate militarily with the United States and other western partners in a range of peacekeeping operations in the Middle East, in Southeast Asia and in the Balkans.

NEW ZEALAND AND THE UNITED STATES TODAY

New Zealand and the United States continue to share the liberal values of freedom and peace, justice and human rights. The countries have a well-developed and mature political relationship, although the military relationship is still limited. The countries work closely towards building a world that shares their values and which is, in the New Zealand government's words, stable, peaceful, prosperous and democratic. The United States is New Zealand's second largest export market, taking some 15 percent of New Zealand's total exports.

The two countries cooperate on a wide range of issues in relation to international trade (such the development of the World Trade Organization and the process of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation), multilateral matters (through the United Nations, other organizations such as the Multinational Force and Observers in the Middle East and for the war on terrorism), and on other key foreign policy issues where the two countries have similar interests. In December 2002, Prime Minister Helen Clark identified these as including human rights, the rule of law, sustainable development, fisheries and whale conservation, climate change, development assistance, disarmament, and protection of the environment, notably in Antarctica.

Defense cooperation remains limited although it is improving. Since the cessation in 1986 of close military links, New Zealand's sustained contribution to peacekeeping (especially in the Middle East, Bosnia and East Timor) and international order more generally has led to some improvement in U.S. relations, although significant restrictions remain in place. Since September 2001, the United States has expressed its strong appreciation for New Zealand's commitment to international antiterrorism efforts, including the contribution of Special Air Service (SAS) troops to operations in Afghanistan and a warship to the Multinational Naval Interception Force in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman. New Zealand now gets operational military intelligence from the United States, there is some operational exercising in relation to multinational military activities and New Zealand servicemen and women freely attend courses at U.S. military schools.

NEW ZEALAND'S REACTION TO U.S. POLICY THEMES

New Zealand does not follow any particular line of support for U.S. policy. Since 1986 New Zealand has become more independent in its policy thought and more prepared to act independently. To the extent that U.S. policy directions align with New Zealand's, they will be supported. Otherwise they will not. There are many specific examples where New Zealand policy on international issues diverges from that of the United States, some of which are discussed below. None of these is significant by itself, but taken together they show how even two countries with very similar world views can diverge on what they consider to be their own national interest.

There is often a divide in New Zealand between the (public) views of the government on U.S. security policy, which is supportive with some specific reservations, and opinions held by the wider public. This is especially pronounced in relation to the "war on terrorism," and its extension to war on Iraq. The divergences may be seen clearly in media editorial pages where security issues generally, and the actions of the United States in Afghanistan and the Middle East, and New Zealand's support for those actions in particular, are given extremely sceptical scrutiny.

New Zealand policy makers take public note of U.S. policies only if they directly affect New Zealand. Few U.S. policy pronouncements are specifically reflected by Wellington in its own policy directions unless there is a clear correlation between the policy held by the United States and New Zealand's own interests. Thus, the U.S. policy on agricultural subsidies is of considerably more interest than U.S. assertions about the "axis of evil," or what are seen as the more or less routine statements of defense and security policy in the Quadrennial Defense Review and the National Security Strategy papers. New Zealand is no longer concerned about its status as "friend" rather than "ally," although many in New Zealand may still consider the United States an ally as well as a friend. The concept of "ally" is likely being used differently from the way it is used by U.S. policy makers.

Broad themes within U.S. security policy as articulated in the U.S. policy documents resonate both positively and negatively with New Zealand policy makers.

THE WAR ON TERRORISM

New Zealand responded almost immediately to the attacks of 11 September 2001 with the offer of political and military support. Prime Minister Clark observed, "In New Zealand, we saw the attacks as attacks on humanity. We resolved to work with the United States and other nations to make a stand against this evil and those responsible for it."

Immediately after the United States announced that it would commence operations against the al Qaeda network based in Afghanistan, New Zealand offered military support both directly to the United States in Operation Enduring Freedom and as part of other international efforts. That support has included a special forces unit, officers and logistic personnel attached to the International Security Assistance Force (New Zealand is the only country outside Europe to provide support to the ISAF) and a liaison team at Central Command headquarters in Florida.

Subsequently, in the Pacific region, New Zealand has joined with the United States and Australia to assist Pacific Island countries increase their capabilities on counterterrorism. In the broader Asia-Pacific region, New Zealand has been active in putting counterterrorism cooperation on the agenda of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). New Zealand has been co-Chair of the ARF in 2002-2003 and it has ensured that terrorism and the means to counter it were and will continue to be the focus of regional dialogue.

The New Zealand government does have reservations about the general concept of a "war on terrorism" but agrees that specific terrorist threats should be attacked and has strongly supported the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan both in word and deed. New Zealand does not openly criticize U.S. prosecution of the war on terror, but New Zealand's media do. For example, an editorial discussing the successful attack by a remotely controlled aircraft on a car apparently carrying al Qaeda members asked rhetorically: "Has the world descended so far towards anarchy that its main superpower can be so heedless of law?" and concluded that "the rest of the world must press the United States to reconsider the morality of its actions."

Support for the war on terrorism is not completely unconditional. New Zealand politicians explicitly link current manifestations of international terrorism to the resolution of Palestine-Israel issues, something they see the United States as being reluctant to address. In the longer term, New Zealand would expect this issue to be addressed as part of the wider war on terrorism.

THE WAR ON IRAQ

Although New Zealand supports the war on terrorism, it is not so sure of the link with Iraq. For many political leaders (and most of public opinion), there is no clear connection between international terrorism and Iraq. Subsequent attempts to identify Iraq as a threat to world peace because of its attempts to develop weapons of mass destruction and as a threat to its own people because of general contempt for human rights are seen by most in New Zealand as self-serving justifications for “Bush’s war.”

Despite that, New Zealand would, grudgingly, support a war against Iraq but only in the context of a United Nations mandated operation and thus within the bounds of international law. In December 2002, Prime Minister Clark argued that “we believe the Security Council, representing the will of the international community, must make that decision. The use of force remains an option available to the Council — if diplomatic, inspection, and disarmament processes do not succeed. Should the Security Council decide on the use of force, New Zealand as a committed member of the UN would endeavor to make a contribution.” Force, clearly, should be used only as a last resort.

Because of New Zealand’s commitments in East Timor since the 1990s and Afghanistan since 2001, which have placed a strain on the country’s limited military resources, combat forces would not likely be sent to Iraq; however, humanitarian, medical and logistic support would be considered.

New Zealand has a frigate operating in the Gulf region with the multinational naval interception force, a C130 transport aircraft for support operations in and around Iraq, and has provided personnel to the UN inspection teams operating within Iraq in search of evidence of prohibited weapons programs. New Zealand has offered aid money, a medical team, engineers and transport aircraft for rebuilding Iraq after any war.

OTHER INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ISSUES

In military terms the fact of U.S. military supremacy in both quantitative and qualitative measures is taken as a given. New Zealand also takes note of what it perceives to be the United States’ desire to remain militarily dominant in the world. Neither fact has much bearing on New Zealand’s defense policy directions. New Zealand recognizes that the United States seeks the certainty rather than probability of security, but concludes that this is probably not achievable, even for the United States. The continued reliance of the United States on nuclear weapons for defensive purposes is deplored, as is the shift to concepts of preemptive defense.

Foreign Affairs Minister Phil Goff argued in May 2001 “the establishment of a missile defense system runs the risk of halting and reversing multilateral progress towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.” He noted though that “it is a positive factor that both the United States and Russia are talking about major downsizing of their nuclear weapons stockpiles.”

New Zealand is a partner with the United States in KEDO, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization, which provides an alternative to North Korea’s nuclear program. Any resumption of that program would be seen as a threat to regional security. New Zealand therefore firmly supports the United States in its condemnation of North Korea’s approach to nuclear development. New Zealand has declared that no further aid will be given to North Korea until the programme is clearly halted. Furthermore the halt must be verified.

On other international security issues such as the unification of the Korean peninsula, relations between Taiwan and China or the dispute in Kashmir, New Zealand's position is broadly aligned to that of the United States. New Zealand policy makers are probably more strongly in favor of Korean reunification and South Korea's sunshine policy, and more supportive of China's position over Taiwan than their U.S. counterparts. Conversely, New Zealand policy is less supportive of Pakistan than is the United States.

BILATERAL SECURITY ISSUES

The defense relationship between New Zealand and the United States has been curtailed since 1986 except for the particularly close relationship that continues between the two countries in the realm of electronic intelligence gathering and sharing, and in the use by the United States of Christchurch as its port of departure for operations in Antarctica.

New Zealand deplores the limited defense relationship it has with the United States, but sees no point in trying to resolve the status of the Anzus Treaty. For each country the defense relationship is unfinished, probably unfinishable, business. The United States waits for New Zealand to alter its legislation, to the extent at least of allowing nuclear powered warships in to New Zealand waters, while New Zealand waits for the United States to accept that neither nuclear powered nor armed vessels need visit New Zealand. For both political and policy reasons, neither country is likely to change its position in the short term.

However, New Zealand views the defense relationship as important; partially so for general security reasons and especially so if New Zealand is to participate in international coalition operations effectively. New Zealand forces need to be operationally effective and equipped to a level where they can carry out their tasks without being a danger to themselves and their coalition partners. This can be done best, New Zealand officials believe, through a close relationship with the United States. Given the narrow likelihood of this occurring through changes in the non-nuclear policy, New Zealand will continue to "show willing" by participating in military activities the United States considers to be important in hopes that this will bring about a policy change in the medium term. At the base of the New Zealand position is the thought that it is not untenable for New Zealand to be a friend of the United States rather than an ally.

WORLD VIEWS

It is not just the immediate issues of war and peace that have security implications. The world view held by countries can also have a direct effect on national and international security.

The United States is seen as having a preference for democratic values, the application of human rights norms and the rule of law internationally. New Zealand works closely with the United States to uphold these values.

New Zealand agrees with the fundamental tenets held by the United States of international relations occurring ideally in a world based on free, pluralist and democratic states with market economies and open societies. New Zealand departs from the United States however, in that New Zealand believes that the international community is more important than any single state within it, including the United States. For that reason, New

Zealand opposes unilateral actions to resolve disputes, whether in the trade sphere or for national security. There is no constituency in New Zealand for the thought that unilateral action might be morally necessary to ensure security, although some would accept that it could be a pragmatic response to certain limited situations generally defined by the United Nations Charter.

New Zealand notes the contradictions in U.S. policies between for example the calls for free markets and U.S. tariff protection for favored domestic industries and subsidies for others. The U.S. domestic imperatives are understood, but New Zealand politicians will continue to note “the United States commitment to agriculture liberalization through the WTO” and hold the United States to its declaratory policy by working for the “common cause,” as New Zealand’s Prime Minister Helen Clark put it in a December 2002 speech in Washington DC.

New Zealand also notes the contradictions between calls by the United States for democracy and the promotion of human rights internationally and its support for antidemocratic regimes and its acceptance of practices by its allies that draw calumny on its foes. In November 2002, New Zealand’s foreign minister argued that “unless we accept that we should protest and take action when universal rights accepted by the international community are abridged, then we are complicit in allowing those abuses to continue.” Implicit criticism is made of the United States for its acceptance as “allies” in the war on terrorism of regimes that would under other circumstances be vilified. This no doubt reflects a New Zealand view that foreign policy should have a somewhat more moral basis than that shown in current U.S. approaches.

New Zealand is dismayed by the increasing U.S. reluctance to engage with multilateral institutions (in many cases established by or at the urging of the United States) except as a means to achieve unilateral U.S. ends. The U.S. a la carte approach to multilateral processes is deprecated, as is the U.S. reluctance to cede any sovereignty to international institutions. Specifically, New Zealand disagrees with the way the United States has sidelined or renounced (explicitly or implicitly) international organizations and conventions, many established by or with the support of the United States, such as the United Nations itself, the International Criminal Court, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the Ottawa Convention banning landmines. New Zealand believes that the United States weakens international security by putting itself outside the international system.

New Zealand worries that the United States has an impatience with diplomacy and a preference for force. This may be understood when the target is one of the current members of the “axis of evil” (although that concept does not resonate with New Zealand policy makers), but New Zealand remains worried that the United States can be arbitrary in its choice of demons.

CONCLUSION

The United States is important to New Zealand because of its size and role internationally, because of the shared history of security cooperation which has lasted more than 50 years, because of the fact that the two countries share a very similar world view, and for economic reasons (which for New Zealand are a security issue). For these reasons, New Zealand is usually inclined to follow U.S. leads on international issues. But New Zealand will diverge when the United States acts unilaterally and when the United States attacks core beliefs such as nuclear issues.

New Zealand's Prime Minister made several visits to the United States in 2002 resulting in good exchanges with the Bush administration. New Zealand's nuclear legislation remains an issue for the Washington, but New Zealand's objective is "to move the relationship forward on the basis of the many values and interests we share with the United States, including the need to counter international terrorism."

New Zealand's relations with the United States entail much more than U.S. security policies. In the short to medium term security policies are important for the United States and thus important for New Zealand. For the longer term, New Zealand is more concerned with establishing an international order conducive to the values that each country shares. Few in New Zealand are convinced that current U.S. security policies are the best way to achieve that world.